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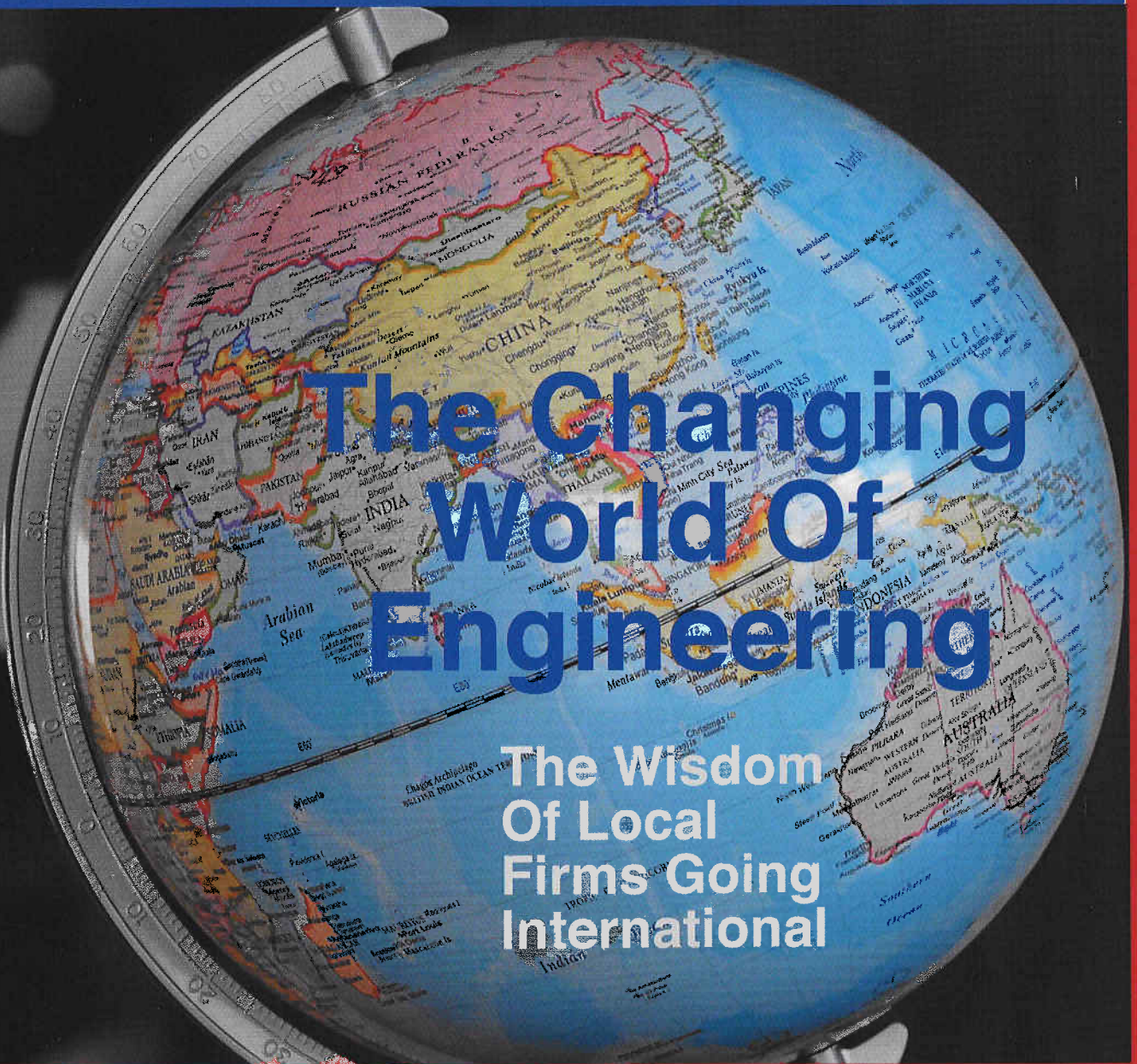
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# ENGINEERING MINNESOTA



## The Changing World Of Engineering

The Wisdom  
Of Local  
Firms Going  
International

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## ENGINEERS AND THE LAW

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# Team Approach Works Well For Accident Investigations

There seems to be no end to the public's fascination with television shows involving crime scene investigations. CSI programs have been a gold mine for the CBS television network. Shows — at last count — cover CSI New York, Las Vegas and Miami.

Although such shows have caught the public's fancy, the truth is the process of crime solving shown on the screen bears little resemblance to the real life process. Real life investigators and forensic engineers use evolving methods that are far more time consuming than television counterparts. Approaches are constantly modified in order to meet the ideal goal of providing clients with fast, accurate and efficient investigations.

One significant change has involved moving toward a team approach for investigations. The law firm of Meagher & Geer is a leader in the area. The firm has created a rapid response group of attorneys, featuring several who are also experienced engineers. The firm's Catastrophic Loss Team is headed by senior attorney and partner, Russ Melton, whose background includes teaching a course about fires and explosions at the University of Minnesota's Institute of Technology.

Melton's approach to determining the cause and origin of problems has been to assemble a team of attorneys who also are trained in engineering and science disciplines. "I think we have assembled a very qualified group of attorneys with unique engineering experience who can compete with the best in the country," Melton said. These engineers-turned-lawyers have backgrounds in engineering disciplines ranging from civil and mechanical to chemical, metallurgical and nuclear. Melton believes it is easier to teach an engineer to become a lawyer than to teach an attorney about engineering.

The Meagher & Geer team generated exuberant praise from one client a year ago for its response to a fire at a chemical plant in Columbus, WI. Steve Quandt is executive vice president of Columbus Chemical Industries. One of his company's plants was the site of a serious fire. Quandt praised Melton's investigative team as no less than "the best in the world." He was also impressed by the way the legal/engineering team was able to placate "every regulatory agency I had ever dreamed of." He was especially impressed by the team's ability to get representatives of the Occupational Health and Safety Administration "to calm down" and end threats.

Melton is quick to emphasize, however, that the firm's Catastrophic Loss Team is best used immediately after an incident occurs — and

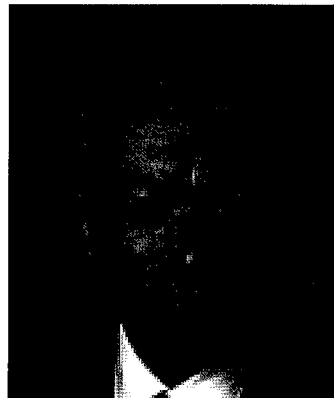
before a lawsuit is filed. He recounts a conversation with one business owner who asked how much Melton's services would cost if he were to be hired. Melton's response was "Your question should be, 'How much will it cost you if you don't hire me?'" Melton adds, "We want clients to use our 'pre-litigation' services" to manage an incident before litigation starts.

For certain, Meagher & Geer has assembled an eclectic group of engineers to comprise its dozen member rapid response team. Members include: John Radmer, a mechanical engineer whose engineering experience features a stint with Eden Prairie-based Hysitron, Inc.; Josh Iverson, a University of Minnesota civil engineering graduate whose background includes working for long-time Twin Cities structural engineer Doug Iverson, P. E.; and chemical engineer Nisha Taneja who spent five years with the St. Paul-based EMA, Inc., consulting firm.

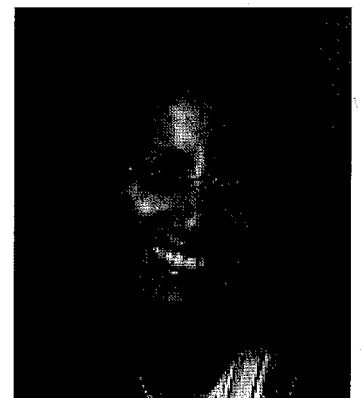
The three engineers-turned-lawyers said they were attracted to engineering as college students because of the problem-solving challenges the profession presents. Although the appeal of engineering practice diminished over time for the trio, the desire to find solutions to problems has not. They find significant opportunity to employ problem-solving skills in legal work.

Taneja acknowledges she considered a legal career before studying chemical engineering at the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, but she admits that the idea of a pre-law undergraduate course load did not appeal to her. She also had family connections to engineering, including her father, who is an electrical engineer, and several uncles, one of whom is a chemical engineer.

The five years Taneja spent working for EMA involved a heavy focus on industrial facilities and plant automation as well as



Melton



Taneja

hazardous waste and wastewater management. She enjoyed the experience, especially the opportunity to work with engineers specializing in engineering disciplines such as mechanical and electrical. In fact, when a senior engineer contemplated leaving the firm, it caused Taneja to reassess her own career path. That reassessment led to law school. She attended Hamline Law School. After graduation, she was a clerk to Minnesota Court of Appeals Judge Terri Stoneburner before joining the Meagher & Geer law firm.

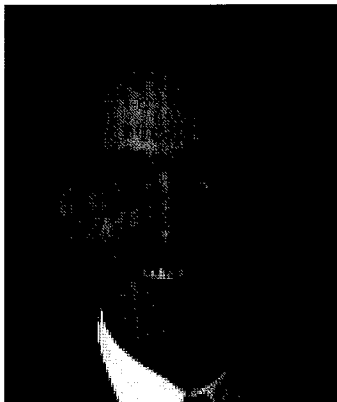
Radmer's path to the law firm was more rapid. He had always excelled at math and science courses in high school and knew he would pursue an engineering career. Interest in that pursuit, however, was challenged by a longtime fascination with public policy and law. After obtaining a degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Wisconsin, he worked for Hysitron, a manufacturer of testing systems, as a sales engineer before attending William Mitchell College of Law.

"While I had ability in science and math, I always questioned whether spending all my time at a CAD station was something I wanted to do all my life," Radmer explained. The very apparent answer was no. Radmer said he likes the "people aspect" of working on legal matters and also the opportunity to have some influence on public policy. "Doing what I am doing now is a good match of my interests and skills. And," he continued, "it still provides me opportunity to be a problem solver." John has risen through the ranks and often leads investigations.

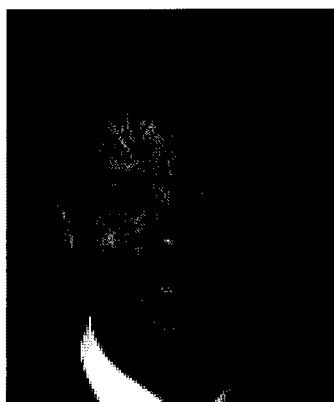
The challenge of confronting problems also appealed to legal colleague Iverson who worked for a Twin Cities structural engineering firm before becoming an attorney.

Iverson is a strong proponent of working with clients to head off problems before they explode—literally and figuratively. Iverson summed up the team's vision: "As trained engineers, we are likely to see things non-engineer attorneys don't. Providing pre-litigation service is something we take very seriously. Most of the time, we are able to convince clients that it is better to spend a little more effort and time in addressing issues early on, rather than to have a far larger expense battling over an issue in the courtroom."

For more information about the Meagher & Geer Catastrophic Loss Group, visit the firm's website at [www.meagher.com](http://www.meagher.com).



Radmer



Iverson

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